

Optimizing the Role of the Master of Ceremony in Hybrid Events: Strategic Approaches for Effective Communication

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Abstract

In the digital era, hybrid events are an innovative solution in combining two elements, namely physical and virtual audiences. This research aims to analyze the role of MC in maximizing audience engagement through effective communication strategies. Using a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study design at several hybrid events. Data collection through observation, interviews and documentation. The research results show that the MC has a very strategic role as the main key in an event. Challenges faced by MC include technical obstacles, involvement of both audiences, and sudden changes to the event schedule. The strategies used to create effective communication include inclusive communication, improvising, two-way interaction, appropriate time management, and the use of nonverbal communication which have proven effective in creating a more interactive and inclusive event atmosphere. This research provides practical guidance and enriches the literature. However, limitations in case coverage and research methods indicate the need for further studies with a more comprehensive approach for more representative results.

Keywords:

Hybrid Event; Audience;
MC; Communication
Strategy

Abstrak

Dalam era digital, acara hybrid sebagai solusi inovatif dalam menggabungkan dua elemen, yakni audiens fisik dan virtual. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis peran MC dalam memaksimalkan keterlibatan audiens melalui strategi komunikasi yang efektif. Menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus pada beberapa acara hybrid. Pengumpulan data melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa MC memiliki peran yang sangat strategis sebagai kunci utama dalam sebuah acara. Tantangan yang dihadapi oleh MC meliputi kendala teknis, keterlibatan kedua audiens, dan perubahan rundown acara secara mendadak. Strategi yang digunakan agar tercipta komunikasi yang efektif meliputi komunikasi inklusif, berimprovisasi, interaksi dua arah, pengelolaan waktu yang tepat, serta penggunaan komunikasi nonverbal terbukti efektif menciptakan suasana acara yang lebih interaktif dan inklusif. Penelitian ini memberikan panduan praktis dan memperkaya literatur. Namun keterbatasan pada cakupan kasus dan metode penelitian menunjukkan perlu adanya studi lanjutan dengan pendekatan yang lebih komprehensif untuk hasil yang lebih presentatif.

Kata kunci:

Acara Hybrid; Audiens; MC;
Strategi Komunikasi

INTRODUCTION

In the era of Industry 5.0, technology is rapidly developing and influencing various aspects of life (MUSLIMIN, 2024). The rapid development of technology has made access to social media, mobile applications, and internet-based platforms easier for all segments of society (Mokobombang et al., 2023; Kautsar et al., 2024). Hybrid events have nowadays become an innovative solution for organizing both public and professional activities by combining direct interaction and online streaming. A hybrid event is an event that shows the audiences directly both those physically present and those participating online (Afriyadi et al., 2023; Tanwir et al., 2023). Hybrid refers to a combination or blend that utilizes the strengths of two different elements to produce more efficient or engaging results (Fatma et al., 2023). This phenomenon has gained attention since the COVID-19 pandemic, which encourages organizations and institutions to adopt digital technologies such as Zoom, live streaming, and similar tools (Kusnanto et al., 2024).

In a hybrid event, organizers must also ensure the smooth operation of the technology used, such as stable internet connections, optimal audio-visual quality, and the ability to manage communication effectively. The Master of Ceremony (MC) plays a crucial role in this context. An MC is responsible for guiding an event, including formal, semi-formal, entertainment, talk shows, and more (Rahayu et al., 2022; Noermanzah et al., 2020). Optimizing the role of the Master of Ceremony (MC) is extremely important to ensure the success of events, especially in the currently popular hybrid format. The MC not only manages the running event but also serves as a connector between the physical and virtual audiences (Bowdin et al., 2023).

Previous research has explored the role of the MC in face-to-face events, including the use of verbal and nonverbal communication to build connections with the audience. A study by Sari & Syafriani (2023) titled “The Communication of the Master of Ceremony (MC) in Guiding Wedding Events in Lubuk Basung District, Agam Regency” employed a descriptive qualitative method by using observation and interviews for data collection. The results of this study indicate that the Master of Ceremony (MC) in guiding wedding events interacts face-to-face with the audience by employing a transparent and open communication style. In guiding the event, it was still found some obstacles, such as technical obstacles, humanistic troubles, and semantic troubles. The MC was able to fulfil their role as a communicator who understands the situation and conditions, ensuring that the event runs very well.

Research about the MC in online formats has also been conducted, focusing on technological challenges and virtual interactions. A study by Harsapranata et al. (2024) titled “Enhancing the Quality of Master of Ceremony (MC) Cadres of PKK by Utilizing *Virtual Speech Applications*” highlights that in the technological era, the use of technology greatly assists various activities, including learning and communication techniques. The enhancement of the MC's quality through the use of virtual speech applications has improved the capabilities of PKK cadres in Cibubur to serve as moderators and MC. Additionally, the MC plays a vital role for the audience without the need for direct interaction. Furthermore, research conducted by Nuralmi et al. (2023) titled “Strategies for Being an Effective Master of Ceremony in Public Speaking” demonstrates that an MC plays a crucial role in maintaining the smoothness, excitement, and quality of an event. It is important to note that being a Master of Ceremony (MC) is not a simple task. However, with consistent practice and self-development, anyone can be a successful MC.

This research reflects the importance of developing public speaking skills and the significant role of an MC in maintaining the quality of an event.

A study conducted by Kristina (2023) titled “Public Speaking for MC (Master of Ceremony): Strategies for Enhancing Students’ Communication Skills” shows how public speaking for the Master of Ceremony (MC) can improve verbal and nonverbal communication skills among students. Using a qualitative approach with a phenomenological theory, the subjects of the research were students involved in the MC community at the Faculty of Communication Sciences, Bhayangkara University, Jakarta Raya. Based on the research findings, public speaking plays a crucial role in enhancing communication skills and overcoming various symptoms of communication anxiety, both verbal and nonverbal, among students in the MC community at the Faculty of Communication Sciences, Bhayangkara University, Jakarta Raya.

However, the role and strategies of the MC in hybrid formats have not been extensively discussed. Based on the four previous studies, there are both similarities and differences. The similarities cover the importance of the MC's style and communication skills in guiding an event while the differences lie in the lack of strategic approaches used by the MC to establish effective communication, especially in hybrid event formats. The complexity of hybrid events, which involve both physical and virtual audiences simultaneously, requires specific strategies to create a cohesive audience experience. An approach that can relate these unique dynamics is essential to provide practical guidance that has not been widely covered in the literature. It indicates that this research contributes new insights by introducing a more comprehensive approach, where the MC is expected not only to master verbal communication techniques but also to utilize technology and online interactions for maintaining audience engagement in both platforms.

This study aims to analyse and examine the role of the MC in maximizing audience engagement in hybrid events through effective communication strategies, both verbal and nonverbal. Some main questions include: 1) What is the role of the MC in hybrid events?; 2) What challenges does the MC face in managing both physical and virtual audiences simultaneously?; 3) What communication strategies are most effective in creating an inclusive atmosphere and experience? The answers to these questions are expected to provide new insights and practical guidance for MC and event organizers, so it can enable them to manage events more effectively, create smooth communication with the audience, and overcome the potential challenges, especially in hybrid events involving both physical and virtual audiences.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design (Fadli, 2021). Descriptive qualitative research is a type of research aimed at deeply describing or presenting a phenomenon, event, or situation based on facts occurring in the field, without using numbers or statistics as the primary tools (I. N. Sari et al., 2022). The research was conducted on several hybrid events. The researcher, in examining the issues, does not prove or reject the hypotheses formulated before processing the data and analysing a problem in a non-numeric manner. Additionally, the descriptive qualitative research method aims to understand phenomena holistically (Ramdhan, 2021). A case study was chosen to explore the role of the MC and their communication strategies in hybrid events. Data collection was carried out through observation, interviews, and documentation.

The data analysis technique used in this study is the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction focuses on

important information from the event organizers, MC, and audience to explore their experiences and challenges, which were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation. Data presentation is done in the form of tables, images, and flowcharts to facilitate the identification of patterns and relationships in the data, while conclusion drawing results the main themes and in-depth narratives about the MC's strategic approaches in hybrid events for effective communication.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

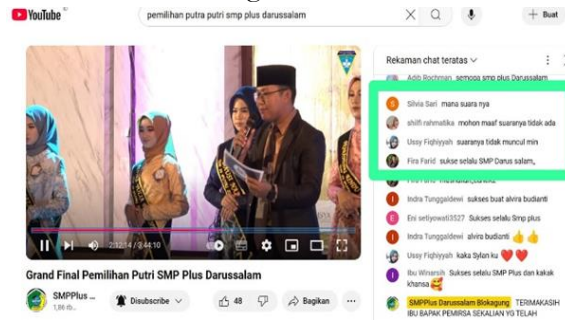
The results of this study indicate that the Master of Ceremony (MC) is an integral part of the success of hybrid events, not only by ensuring technical smoothness but also by enhancing the overall audience experience. Below are the data obtained from interviews with informants involved in several hybrid events.

Table 1 Master of Ceremony

Roles	Obstacles	Strategics
Facilitator in Events	Technical disruptions such as audio issues for the online audience	Inclusive communication
Fasilitator	Changes to the event rundown	Effective time management
Key Role in the Event	Balancing the engagement of both audience groups	Performing improvisation Use of nonverbal communication Maintaining two-way interaction

Source: Research Finding

Figure. 1



Source: Research Finding

Figure. 2



Source: Research Finding

Figure. 3



Source: Research Finding

Based on the interview results from several informants, including the MC, event organizers, and the audience from various hybrid events, as well as findings from several YouTube platforms, the researcher identified several key findings that explore the role of the MC in hybrid format events, the challenges faced, and the strategies used to establish effective communication with the audience.

DISCUSSION

The Role of the Master of Ceremony in Hybrid Events

The Master of Ceremony (MC) is an individual who is responsible for guiding an event, including formal, semi-formal, entertainment, talk shows, and more (Rahayu et al., 2022; Noermanzah et al., 2020). Being an MC or event host is a professional role that manages the flow of the event (Due & Vicky, 2024), it is similar to how a traffic officer directs traffic on the road. Likewise, the MC organizes a series of events to ensure they run smoothly. Therefore, the MC serves as a benchmark for the success of the event from the beginning to the end of event, as planned by the event organizers (Rahayu et al., 2022). Being an MC is not an easy task, but it is not impossible to learn.

In hybrid events, the role of the MC is crucial. Hybrid event is an event which shows audiences both those who physically present and those who are participating online (Afriyadi et al., 2023; Tanwir et al., 2023). The abilities of an MC will determine whether an event will be successful, smooth, and lively or not. The MC's skills in conducting the event are key to its success. Based on interviews with informants, there is a perception regarding to the role of the Master of Ceremony in hybrid format events.

First, the MC plays the role of the event guide, which is essential for the success of the event. As a facilitator, the MC is responsible for managing the flow of the event by ensuring that each segment runs smoothly, and understanding the needs of both audiences. This role is particularly important in the hybrid format because in leading an event, the MC does not only focus on one group audience but also the MC must engage and involve both the in-person and virtual audiences. It was stated by an informant, the MC at the Duta Santri MTs Al Amiriyyah 2024 event. This statement aligns with what another informant (an audience member) mentioned, that the role of the MC in hybrid events is not just as a host but also as a guide. This significantly impacts the success of the event.

According to the situational leadership theory developed by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard, this theory emphasizes that a leader must be flexible and able to adapt to the specific situations (Hendriani et al., 2024). The theory acknowledges that there is no single leadership style which is suitable for all situations. Leaders must consider the readiness and capabilities of the individuals they are leading and then determine the most effective style, such as providing appropriate direction or support. The role of the Master of Ceremony (MC) as an event guide is closely related to situational leadership theory because the MC is not only a host but also acts as a leader who must adjust their leadership style to the situation, the type of event, and the audience they are facing.

Second, another statement from informants during the interviews indicated that in hybrid events, the MC serves as the primary facilitator. The MC has role as the connector between the event organizers and the audience, uniting various elements of the event, managing smooth transitions between segments, and maintaining audience interaction throughout the event. Without an MC, the coordination between the audience and the event organizers would not function effectively. It is in line with what the MC stated at the Parent-Teacher Meeting for Class X at SMA Darussalam. This event utilized a hybrid format, involving parents who attended as a physical audience and those who participated virtually. In this context, the informant felt

that the MC's role as a facilitator was crucial in connecting both audiences and coordinating with the event organizers about the concept and audience's expectations for the event.

Additionally, the MC possesses the skills to handle unexpected situations swiftly and calmly, such as when technical disruptions or sudden changes to the event schedule occur. The MC can make the situation calm down by diverting the audience's attention, such as by providing humour or engaging in interaction to keep the atmosphere positive and dynamic. In this role, the MC is not only a guide but also a facilitator in creating a memorable and efficient event experience. With high adaptability, strong communication skills, and expertise in managing audience emotions, the MC plays a vital role in ensuring that the event meets its objectives and has a positive impact for all people involved.

Facilitation theory focuses on how an individual can ease or assist a group or individual in achieving the specific goals by providing clear structure and supporting effective interactions (Al-Adwan et al., 2021). This theory is highly relevant to the context of the MC's role as the primary facilitator because the MC guides the event, manages communication, and ensures active and positive engagement from the audience. A facilitator acts not only as a director but also as a guide, managing group dynamics and ensuring that every individual (audience member) feels involved and respected. In this case, the MC is responsible for creating an atmosphere that supports collaboration and interaction.

Third, according to interviews with informants (MC) at the Grand Final of the 2024 Junior High School Prince and Princess Election, it was revealed that the role of an MC in hybrid events is considered as a key element. Due to their crucial role in managing the flow of the event, ensuring audience engagement, and handling unexpected situations, the MC is regarded as an essential key or main element of the event. The MC plays a significant role in the success of the event and it is not merely someone who speaks in front of the audience. The MC is an inseparable part of the success of an event, whether it is conducted directly, virtually, or in a hybrid format. In every condition, the MC is required to be adaptive to the needs of the audience to make the event meets expectations. Thus, the MC is not only a guide or facilitator in an event but also a key player in the success of an event, especially in the hybrid format.

The role of the MC as the main key in hybrid events is supported by the role theory, which is a concept that helps to understand how individuals perform key roles in social situations (Habsy et al., 2024). In this context, the Master of Ceremony is the individual who plays a central role in directing the flow of the event. This theory focuses on how the MC can understand, meet, and manage social and functional expectations. In an event, especially in a hybrid format, an MC is not just someone who speaks in front of the audience. The MC is a figure who drives various roles with interrelated tasks, such as being an event guide, a communication intermediary, and a problem solver. These roles are not only dictated by scripts or event guidelines but also by the expectations that arise from the audience, the organizers, and the evolving situation during the event. This situation requires a deep ability to create an inclusive and interactive atmosphere.

Challenges in Hybrid Events

The organization of hybrid events, which combine physical and virtual audiences, presents several challenges that can affect the MC in guiding the event. The differences in format between physical and virtual audiences require the MC to have extra skills to ensure engagement and effective communication with both groups simultaneously. One of the main challenges is the technical aspect, such as unstable internet quality, both at the event location or from the virtual audience. It is based on what was conveyed by one informant, the organizer of the Grand Final of the 2024 Plus Darussalam Junior High School Prince and Princess Election. To address this issue, thorough technical preparation is necessary, including using devices with dual-band Wi-Fi capabilities or LAN cable connections, which are generally more stable than regular Wi-Fi. Providing a recording of the event for online participants in case of unavoidable connection disruptions is also essential.

Data in Figure 1 shows the results of the research, the researcher found a comment from the virtual audience about technical difficulties during the event. These disruptions occurred due to several factors, such as improper audio input-output settings, suboptimal microphone connections, and the operator's lack of responsiveness in handling technical issues on-site. Those conditions make the virtual audience unable to hear clearly, so the important information in the event is not conveyed effectively. In this case, the technical operator needs to continuously monitor the comment section from the virtual audience because it serves as a channel of interaction for online participants to express their opinions and suggestions.

Additionally, audio-visual synchronization is crucial to ensure that both audiences have the same experience (Waliulu et al., 2024). This statement aligns with what another informant (the MC) mentioned during the East Java and Bali Al Banjari Festival, where technical challenges, such as audio disruptions, significantly affected the virtual audience's ability to join the event comfortably. These challenges greatly impact the MC during the event. When challenges arise, an MC must wisely address them while paying attention to both audiences to ensure neither is neglected.

The next challenge is how the MC can balance the engagement of both audience groups. Figure 2 shows comments from the virtual audience indicating that the MC and speakers were not sufficiently involving them. The audiences who are present at the venue directly enjoyed the atmosphere and physical interaction more, while the virtual audience often felt less engaged. In interviews with several virtual audience members, they emphasized the importance of being respected and involved in the event, even if they were not physically present. The lack of attention from the MC to the virtual audience makes them feel being neglected, as they do not receive enough interaction or attention compared to the physical audience. The MC's limitations in two-way communication with virtual participants can decrease their engagement in the event, especially affecting the overall atmosphere (Pahrudin, 2020). Without adequate attention, the virtual audience may find it difficult to follow the event, especially if there are technical issues or discrepancies in information between the physical and virtual audiences.

Suggestions from the audience show that the MC should more frequently greet the virtual audience or read comments appearing in the chat to make them feel more involved. Nevertheless, the virtual audience also acknowledged that hybrid events provide opportunities for those who cannot attend in person to keep participating in that event. "It is indeed more challenging for the MC, but if they can balance both audience groups, this event can be a satisfying experience for everyone," stated by one audience in the Class X Parent Meeting at

SMA Darussalam. It indicates that despite the challenges, hybrid events offer opportunities to create a more inclusive experience and connect audiences from various locations by using interesting ways.

In hybrid events, another challenge that can affect the MC in guiding the event is unexpected changes to the rundown of event. Based on interviews with several informants (MC), they mentioned that hybrid events have a higher level of complexity compared to conventional events, because they involve technical aspects and coordination with various elements. An unstructured rundown from the organizers requires the MC to understand more deeply and adapt quickly without disturbing both audiences. This challenge is compounded by the need for the MC to ensure that both audience groups keep connected, even there is some adjustments during the event.

The MC's focus in hybrid events not only to ensure both audiences keep engaged, but also to ensure that the technical aspects of the event run smoothly. When changes occur, the MC must manage time effectively so that all people involved feel that they are respected. Effective communication with the production team is crucial to implement changes quickly without compromising the quality of the event. The key to overcome the changes in the event rundown is to keep calm, flexible, and able to improvise while maintaining a comfortable atmosphere for the audience. It demonstrates that the MC in hybrid events needs to have high adaptability and solid communication skills to manage the dynamics of events that are often unpredictable.

MC Strategies for Effective Communication

Through interviews with several informants, including MCs and audience members, five key elements were identified as crucial for achieving success in events. These elements include inclusive communication, improvisation skills, maintaining two-way interaction, effective time management, and optimal use of nonverbal communication. As shown in data from Figure 3, these five factors serve as the main foundation for the MC in creating effective, interactive, and interesting events, particularly when facing the unique challenges presented by the hybrid event format. Inclusive communication is an essential element to ensure that both audiences feel respected and engaged equally. In hybrid events, it is important for the virtual audience not to feel like mere passive audience. They should feel like an integral part of the event. This approach aligns with Allport's (1954) theory of inclusive communication through the Contact Hypothesis, which emphasizes that equal interaction between groups, when it is conducted in supportive conditions, can reduce prejudice and strengthen intergroup relationships (Sugarda, 2022). Within the framework of inclusive communication, this principle is highly relevant because it aims to create a communication space that respects the needs and perspectives of all parties without involving bias or discrimination.

In the context of inclusive communication, particularly for the Master of Ceremony (MC), this approach is implemented by ensuring that the messages conveyed reflect the diversity of the audience. It includes the using of neutral language, fair representation for both audiences, and avoiding stereotypes that could exacerbate social gaps. In this way, inclusive communication becomes not only a means of conveying information but also a medium for building better relationships, mutual respect, and understanding among different groups. Suggested strategies include direct greeting to the virtual audience, accommodating their questions or comments, and utilizing interactive features such as polls or Q&A sessions. By doing so, the MC can foster a stronger sense of togetherness among both physical and virtual audiences.

Hybrid events often present unexpected situations, such as changes to the rundown or technical disruptions. The ability to improvise becomes crucial to ensure that the event continues smoothly. One of the masters of ceremony interviewed stated that when sudden changes occur, the MC must adapt quickly without disturbing the audience. This statement is supported by improvisation theory proposed by Sawyer (2004), which highlights the importance of flexibility and creativity in facing unexpected situations (Seppänen & Toivanen, 2023). The improvisation performed by the MC becomes a critical aspect, especially when dealing with changing or unpredictable situations. According to Sawyer, improvisation is not merely a spontaneous action but the result of deep understanding, adaptability, and situational awareness (Mamédio et al., 2022). The MC must be able to fill time gaps by providing humour, adjusting the flow of conversation, or giving relevant spontaneous responses. With this approach, the negative impact of sudden changes can be minimized, and audience's attention can be maintained.

According to the virtual audiences who are participating in hybrid events, the strategies used by the MC to build communication with the audience, particularly the virtual audience, involve two-way interaction. This technique is a key element for creating effective communication, which is facilitating interaction with both physical and virtual audiences. This is supported by Blumer's (1969) symbolic interaction theory, which explains that active engagement can strengthen the relationship between the speaker and the audience (Haris, 2021). Strategies that can be applied include the warm greeting to the virtual audience, reading comments or questions from the virtual audience, conducting interactive polls, or providing opportunities for the virtual audience to contribute directly. The MC often greets the virtual audience with phrases like "viewers wherever you are" or "viewers watching the live broadcast" during several hybrid events. In this way, the virtual audience feels like an integral part of the event and remains connected to the overall atmosphere, even they are in different locations.

Furthermore, effective time management is a crucial factor in hybrid events, considering the importance of accommodating the needs of two audience groups with different attention characteristics. An MC must be able to manage time fairly between the physical and virtual audiences. Each segment should provide value to both groups without creating excessively long pauses. This approach aligns with Lakein's time management theory (1973), which emphasizes that careful planning and prioritization are key to the successful time management (Farah & Rahma, 2024). In this context, the MC can implement a structured time guide, shorten transitions between segments, and ensure that every part of the event is relevant to all audiences. Timeliness in events is the greatest expectation for both organizers and audiences. Therefore, managing time well is part of the duties and responsibilities of a Master of Ceremony (MC). Thus, time can be useful maximally without compromising the quality of the event experience.

Finally, another strategy used by the MC to build effective communication is the use of nonverbal communication. Nonverbal communication plays a significant role in establishing connections with the audience, both those present physically and virtually. Mehrabian (1972), in his theory of nonverbal communication, indicates that 93% of emotional messages are conveyed through nonverbal elements (Burgoon et al., 2021). From 93%, 55% is coming through body language and 38% through vocal tone. Only 7% of emotional messages are conveyed using words (Abbas & Khan, 2023). It truly emphasizes the importance of nonverbal elements in expressing feelings and emotions in interpersonal communication.

During the hybrid event, several audience members felt that the MC's nonverbal communication style significantly influenced the delivery of information. The expression of messages through verbal communication is supported by nonverbal communication, such as the

use of facial expressions, eye contact, and body language, which makes the message easier for the audience to receive and creates a more inclusive atmosphere (Hendrayady et al., 2023; Saputra et al., 2024). For the virtual audience, clear expressions, friendly hand gestures, and varied vocal tones can help maintain their attention. It is evident that the use of nonverbal communication by the MC in guiding the event is essential and influential in creating effective and interactive communication with the audience.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the role of the Master of Ceremony (MC) in hybrid events is crucial for ensuring that communication run so well among both audiences. The challenges that arise during the execution of hybrid events require the MC to be adaptable, to improvise, and to implement effective communication strategies. This research contributes new insights by updating the perspective on the role of the MC in hybrid events, which has become increasingly important in the current digital era. Although this study provides significant contributions, there are several limitations that need to be considered. Therefore, further research is needed with a larger sample size and a more diverse methodology to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the role of the MC in hybrid events.

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